

The Flea and the Acrobat by taizi

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Relationships: Donatello & Leonardo (TMNT), Donatello & Michelangelo (TMNT), Donatello & Raphael (TMNT), Donatello (TMNT) & April O'Neil, Donatello (TMNT) & Casey Jones, Donatello (TMNT)/Casey Jones/April O'Neil, Leonardo & Raphael (TMNT)

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Summary:

Hawkins, Indiana, 1983. Twelve-year-old Michelangelo has gone missing, and his big brother is convinced that there's something more here than just another sad story about a little boy who never came home.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

This is the beginning of a crossover I started over on tumblr. Definitely will contain spoilers for the show if you haven't seen it yet - and I highly recommend you watch, it's on Netflix. :)

I shuffled some characters around a bit, but it should be easy enough to follow if you're familiar with the source material.

Don's voice breaks mid-word, and he drops his face into his hands, curling into something half his height and trembling and terrified.

"Leo, I think I— I think I'm going *crazy*."

It would be easy to think as much by looking at him, sitting on the floor with a naked lamp in his lap, surrounded by seven more, several strings of Christmas lights a tangled mess at his feet.

But Raph's green eyes are sharp and fierce, and he wraps an arm around Don's shoulders that probably feels like steel.

"You are *not*," he bites out. "Somethin' took the kid, somethin' bad. April saw it, too, remember? It took her friend Irma, right out of Casey's backyard. You got a *picture* of it, Don. We believe you, man."

"Even without all the proof, we believe you," Leo said, meaning it with every inch of his heart. "Something took him, but we're going to get him back. We're going to find him, I promise."

Don *did* get a picture, prowling the woods around his house, *alone*, at *night*, armed with nothing but his precious *camera*. And the picture was terrifying, certainly. A picture he showed them with shaking hands the day he developed the film, of a twisted figure standing behind Irma Langstein the last night she was seen, pale and faceless and distinctly inhuman, like a monster out of their D&D game.

But it's *infinitely* more frightening how close Don put himself to

danger, how little he cares about himself anymore. He doesn't eat or sleep or go to class, he just sits in this empty house surrounded by lights that aren't even plugged in, while his adopted father (a grizzled old veteran nicknamed *Leatherhead*) and Leo's father (Chief of Hawkin's Police Department) tear the town apart.

They found the bike abandoned just off Mirkwood Road, and a half-loaded shotgun in the back shed. There was a hole in the wall from where the front door slammed open, and a few pictures frames were knocked askew along the hallway, all signs of *running* and *danger* and *fear*.

And Don blames himself, hates himself, for not being home.

"But you can't do this to yourself," Leo says firmly. "All this stress isn't good for you, you *know* better. He's a resourceful kid, and he's *smart*, and wherever he is, he's *fine*, and we're going to get him back. No matter how far we have to – "

"That's just it, Leo. I don't think he's far at all. I think he's – "

The radio across the room comes on with a loud click, dial wagging madly through white noise and weak signals. The three of them freeze, going utterly still and silent, like a trio of frightened rabbits; and Leo forgets how to breathe, and Raph uses the arm around Don's shoulders to curl fingers into the collar of Leo's shirt – but Don inhales softly, hopeful and anticipating, like he's been waiting for this all along.

The lamp in his arms lights up, a white so bright it burns – and *how*, it isn't plugged in, the cord is laying *right there*. Leo shields his eyes against the strength of it, momentarily blinded, but he can feel Don lean forward, lean closer.

And then, impossibly, a familiar voice on the radio says, "*Donnie?*"

And Don laughs in stark relief, but it comes out like a sob, and once he's crying he can't stop, and he scrambles blindly forward on his hands and knees.

"Mikey! Oh, god, Mikey, I'm *here!*"

2. Chapter 2

"Donnie? It's April," the choked, frightened voice said over the phone. "I'm so sorry to call you like this, but – is Raph there? It's just – it's Leo, he, um – he..."

And Don was a livewire, grabbing his keys and his jacket and barking at Raph to *get in the car*, peeling down the drive back into town.

"What did she say? What happened?" Raph kept asking, and Donnie kept saying, "I don't know, she was scared, I *don't know*."

It was stupid to leave him. It was *stupid*. Leo had a history of doing really *dumb*, really *reckless* things when he thought it might help. His house was empty, his father out with Leatherhead, combing the state of Indiana for any hint, any clue, any *shred* of Michelangelo, and Leo was all by himself in that huge house, with no one to stop him from cooking up some crazy scheme.

Because Raph left him alone, because of a *stupid* argument about a little girl.

"She's gone," was all Donnie said earlier that night, when he found Raph waiting for him on his front porch. There was something aged and brittle in his face, something two seconds away from folding into grief and despair, and he was still strong enough to hook a hand under Raph's arm and guide him inside. He was only a year older, but he had a way of making Raph feel half his age.

"Leo went home," he added, under the warm overhead lamp in the kitchen and the tangled strings of glowing Christmas lights across the ceiling; cleaning the bloody bump on the back of Raph's head with the same steady hands that held Mikey's when they crossed the street, and stuck bandaids on skinned knees. "He wanted me to tell you he's sorry about what she did."

"Good riddance," Raph had muttered, and wasn't sure if he meant Leo or Eleven.

Or *Karai*, as Leo was calling her now. A name she picked for herself

after hours of playing *Go* and *Karuta* and all the other games Leo could dig up out of the comfortable basement he was hiding her in. '*She really likes Go,*' Leo had said, face shining with fondness for the child they'd found barefoot in the woods and (for whatever stupid reason) brought home. '*She beats me every time we play now.*'

Raph had snapped something cruel about *playing* when they should have been *finding Mikey*; cruel, because it cut even Donatello, who had sat with Karai – *Eleven* – and patiently taught her how compasses work, and how to get a good signal on the walkie-talkies, and smiled when she did, like a knee-jerk reaction. Cruel, because Leo poured every ounce of himself into this hunt for Donnie's baby brother, and Leo was the one who urged his father to *keep looking*, somehow convincing the chief of police that there was something *more* here than a little boy who didn't come home. Leo who gave *everything* and somehow had more to give – Raph knew the time he spent with Eleven was time the rest of them spent sleeping, and Raph had to be an asshole *anyway*.

"You know it was an accident, don't you?" Donnie had said sometime later, sitting in the semi-darkness of the living room with a naked lamp in one hand and a small axe in the other. It didn't make as strange a picture as it would have two weeks ago, and Raph wondered at the state of their lives for a moment. "You and Leo were arguing, and Karai got scared."

Which wasn't a mental image Raph wanted. The poor kid in her borrowed pink dress and borrowed jacket, hair shaved to her scalp and circles under her eyes, crying because Raph was loud and mean and taking his frustration out on Leo, of all people, because Leo was such a convenient scapegoat. Reacting out of violent desperation to make them *stop*, throwing Raph halfway across the junkyard with her *mind*, hard enough that the world went black when his head connected with something solid and he could feel the warmth of blood on the back of his neck.

And *that* had been Leo's fault, too.

"She was probably terrified of going back to that place," Donnie had said, minutes before April's phone call, the voice of reason even when his life was bleak and his brother was gone. "It's probably really

dangerous. She's just a kid, she was just trying to protect us."

"I know," Raph had grudgingly allowed, because as easy as it was to lash out at Leo, it was *impossible* for him to make a target out of Don, he'd rather chew off his arm.

(And maybe also, a little bit, because he knew Donnie was right.)

Don parked right in the driveway, because Raph's parents were pretty relaxed about the coming and going at all hours, as long as homework was done and they made it to school on time. Especially *now*, with what had happened to Mikey, the O'Neils were ready to let Don move in if he asked nice enough, he was so soft-spoken and sad. (It also might have helped that he was close to April *and* Raph, and willing to fix Mr. O'Neil's new TV every time he couldn't get a clear picture.)

Raph's mom and dad didn't know the dirty details – about *other dimensions* and *demogorgons* – but a missing child was probably the worst thing they could imagine in their perfect slice of suburbia. They greeted Donnie kindly as he and Raph came in, sympathetic and understanding when Raph turned down dinner and dragged Donnie upstairs, and Raph would wonder later if it was good parenting or the opposite, that they didn't press or ask questions.

April's room was locked, and her fearful "Who is it?" from behind the closed door turned Raph's heart over. She had been bright and ferocious with worry for Irma, ever since the party at Casey's house that Irma never came home from. A determined April was a force to be reckoned with; and with Casey, Human Battering Ram at her side, and his own friends to worry about, Raph hadn't been worried about her.

Maybe he should have been.

"It's me, sis," he said, and a moment later he was pulled into her room and her arms both, wrapped in the fiercest hug he could remember. She was still an inch or two taller than him, but small and scared in his arms, and he hugged her back just as hard, mind spinning. "Are you okay? Ape? What's going on, what happened?"

Casey dragged Don into the room by the shoulder of his shirt, shut and locked the door behind him, and then Don was the victim of a bruising embrace, too. He blinked, and he looked too worn-thin and worried to blush, but on a better day, in a better place, he might have. As it was, he wove his arms around Casey in turn, and they stood that way, together that way, for what felt like a long time.

Then April sprang back, and her red-rimmed eyes tore at Raph's soul with a strength that surprised him, given how little they hung out with each other anymore. But she was putting herself back together right in front of him, and said firmly, "You need to find Leo."

"He isn't here?" Don said, one arm left curled around Casey's shoulders – and Casey looked shaken and pale, too, what had *happened*? "April, talk to me, you need to tell us what's going on."

And she did, and now Raph was *running*. Leo lived up the street, not that far away, alone in that huge, empty house. Raph sprinted through the dark of the late evening, and flinched stupidly when one of the streetlights flickered, and tried the walkie-talkie again, breathlessly.

"Leo, you moron, *answer* me! Over!" Nothing. Two blocks to go. "You're a real piece of work, you know that? Gettin' yourself almost murdered by some nightmare monster to save my sister, all so I won't be mad at you anymore. Over." *Nothing*. Leo, damn it– "And then takin' off? What the hell, man? I mean, seriously? I'm gonna find you, and when I do..."

"*I'm here*," Leo said, and Raph almost tripped on a crack in the sidewalk. "Sorry."

"Oh, you asshole," Raph said without heat, eyes swimming through grateful tears. April had gone into some terrible, dark place, following the monster that took Irma and Mikey, and Leo had gone in after her. They had both seen terrible things, and April – one of the strongest people Raph knew – was curled into both Casey *and* Don's arms when he left, shuddering through a real-life terror that seemed to have left bruises on her *bones*. And if April was that scared, Leo had to have been, too.

And maybe Leo wouldn't have been out there with Casey and April in the first place, if Raph hadn't been a shitty friend.

Leo opened the front door right as Raph started banging on it, like he'd been waiting in the foyer for the last five minutes. The walkie-talkie was in his hand, and all the lights in the house were on, and he was wet and dripping on the expensive carpet, skin pink and scoured, like he had rushed through a hot, painful shower – and now Raph knew why he had taken so long to answer.

His eyes were impossibly blue, darting past Raph into the shadows of the night, so Raph shouldered his way inside. They could meet up with the others later, he'd call Don and let him know. For now, he moved the chair in the foyer in front of the door, and tried not to hear Leo's breath hitch as he did it. This was *belief* in what Leo had seen without Leo having to fight for it, this was *security* from the monster that they were chasing without having to ask for it, this was –

friendship. This was how that worked.

And then he dragged Leo back up the hall, squinting through the shine of all the overhead lights and lamps, and directed Leo back into the bathroom for a towel and then into his bedroom to dry off for *real* and change clothes again. Got Don on the walkie to let him know everything was fine, and – and holy *shit*, those were Leo's jeans and jacket from earlier in a ball on the floor by the hamper, and they were covered in ash and ooze and *what the hell did he see* –

"I'm sorry about earlier," Leo said, changing as hurriedly as if it were the locker room at school. He was shaking, Raph couldn't help but notice, all up and down his whole body. "I'm sorry Karai hurt you, she didn't mean to. And I'm sorry I didn't listen to you, I should have taken your opinion into –"

"Leo, it's fine," Raph cut him off, because how were they talking about *that* old news right now? "I'm a jackass, you can just say it. Now hurry up so we can go to bed."

Leo didn't smile, just blinked wetly and nodded, climbing into a dry shirt, and Raph tried not to see Mr. Hamato's emergency pistol as Leo

shoved it under his pillow. Raph climbed up onto one side of the bed while Leo sat hunched and uncomfortable on the other, and hated the way his friend's eyes flickered constantly to the window, to the bedroom door, to the closet, to the trembling hands folded in his lap.

"I'm sorry I left before," Raph said abruptly. Ashamed of himself and angry, because Mikey was gone and Donnie was hurting and Leo couldn't carry them all by himself, for all that he *tried* – where did Raph get off, throwing a tantrum and storming off the moment he didn't get his way? What was he, *ten*? "That was stupid. And I shouldn't have yelled at the kid, that was... god, that was..."

"She's a sweet girl," Leo said softly, tentatively, like he was afraid Raph's change of heart would change on him again but he *had* to speak for Karai while she wasn't around to speak for herself. Leo was always so *fair*. Raph wondered how they were friends sometimes. "She'll forgive you."

Raph nodded, because he couldn't think of anything to say, and might have dozed off after that. Woke again to what felt like the middle of the night, even though the room was too bright to tell, and Leo's wide, terrified eyes staring at some corner of the room like it might come alive.

"Leo," he said, "try to sleep. You're safe, it can't get you in here."

Leo's reply was immediate, as if he'd been thinking the same thing all night. "We don't know that."

"Well I *do* know that it's gonna have to go through me to get to you," Raph said, and sat up, and rubbed sleep out of his eyes. Steeling himself for a long night, even as he tugged Leo by the sleeve. "C'mon, your turn for some shut-eye. I'll stay up and keep watch."

Leo let himself be tugged, but he didn't make any move to lay down, searching Raph's eyes for some sign of his sincerity. Raph hated every moment of this clinging fear, and scooted closer, draping an arm around his shoulders. Leo leaned against his side, head listing into Raph's, and *finally*, finally some of that tension started to seep away.

"I'm right here, I promise," Raph said quietly. "I'm not going

anywhere. Try to get some sleep, we'll tackle this thing when you wake up."

And it wasn't until Leo was dozing, warm and solid against Raph's side, that Raph let his thoughts wander towards Mikey. All alone in the nightmare hellscape that had terrified Leo and made April cry, at the mercy of some prowling, faceless beast. Snatched from his own home, speaking through the lights Donnie hung up around their house, *reaching* for his big brother and warning him of danger in equal measure, singing to himself little snatches of his favorite song on the mixtape Raph made him for his birthday – somehow still *alive*. Somehow still waiting.

"So you gotta let me know," Raph sang under his breath, hoping secretly that Mikey was listening; willing the kid to *hear*, through all the bright lights in Leo's bedroom, and all the impossible love in all the stubborn hearts of all the people willing to fight monsters to find him, *"should I stay or should I go?"*